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Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences 1 (2009) 50–60

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

World Conference on Educational Sciences 2009

Academic staff's perceptions on stressors originating from interpersonal relations at work setting: a case study

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Received October 07, 2008; revised December 23, 2008; accepted January 05, 2009

Abstract

This study provides an analysis of academic staff's perceptions on stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in faculty setting. The objectives are to analyse what stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in academic setting are and what academic staffs' perception on stress as a result of stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in academic setting – informal and formal relations with colleagues- are and what their views are in overcoming those kind of stress. The research sought to use qualitative methods to gather the relevant data via semi-structured interviews with academic staff – both in Sheffield Hallam University, UK and in Akdeniz University, TR- working in their present faculty for at least five school period years. The outcome of the research addresses important implications for the professional work life of academic staff in understanding how stress influences colleagues' performance negatively and positively and identifying where unhealthy and healthy stress exist in academic setting.

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Keywords: Stressors; interpersonal relations; academic staff; faculty.

1. Introduction

Stress has been defined in various ways as a feeling of tension and anxiety in the presence of either pleasant or unpleasant experiences (Fooner, 1981); a response syndrome of negative effects such as anger or depression mediated by an appraisal of threat to one's self-esteem or well-being (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978); a consequence of or a general response to an action or a situation that places special or psychological demands, or both, on a person (Jax, Beehr, & Roberts, 1992); a process in which environmental forces threaten an individual's well-being (Hiebert & Farber, 1984); a wear and tear on the body (Hans, 1984); a response to challenging events (Caplan, French, Harrisson, & Pinneau, 1975); a dynamic condition in which the person is confronted with an opportunity, a constraint, or a demand for which resolution is both unclear and of importance (Schuler, 1980) and as a realization by the individual unable to deal with the demands placed upon him/her sufficiently (Lazarus, 1966).

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At a personal level the stress experienced by the individual may cause negative physical and psychological and behavioural effects (Sauter, Hurrell & Cooper, 1989). Physiological effects of stress may include increased blood pressure, increased heart rate, sweating, hot and cold spells, breathing difficulties, muscular tension, and increased gastrointestinal disorders. Emotional effects of stress may include anger, anxiety, depression, lowered self esteem, poorer intellectual functioning (including an inability to concentrate and make decisions), nervousness, irritability, resentment of supervision and job dissatisfaction. Behavioural effects of stress may include decreased performance, absenteeism, higher accident rates, higher turnover rates, higher alcohol and drug abuses, impulsive behaviour, and difficulties in communication (Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995; Sauter, *et al.*, 1989).

Work stress may have both positive and negative effects. However, research on work stress tends to focus on its negative effects (Hellriegel, Slocum & Woodman, 1995). The positive and negative aspects of stress are most apparent in the relationship between stress and performance. Studies of the performance-stress relationship in organizations often show a strong negative correlation between the amount of stress in a work team or department and its overall performance (Allen, 1990). That is, the greater the stress, the lower the productivity and the less stress, the lower the productivity as well but the more optimum level of stress, the more productivity.

Eustress is called a positive, healthful and developmental stress response. The body's resources are mobilized to deal with the stressful stimulus, its aroused sympathetic system returns to normal (Selye, 1974). Just as tension causes muscles to strengthen, some level of stress may lead to better performance and a more adjusted personality. On the other hand, distress includes those stress responses that weaken a person's physical and psychological capacity to cope with the environmental stressors. As long as one becomes less resistant to stress, he or she may perceive a larger number of more severe stressors in the environment. This may make it more difficult to cope, leading to more serious physiological and psychological problems (Tosi, Rizzo & Carroll, 1990). Thus, stress is not necessarily negative, an optimum level of stress at work will activate and energize staff, which strengthen their physiology and psychology and make them resistant to stress.

Nowadays, work related stress is of increasing concern as it has significant economic implications for the organizations through employee dissatisfaction, lowered productivity and lowered emotional and physical health of the employees (Matterson & Ivancevich, 1987). Namely, occupational stress contributes to a significant portion of worker compensation claims, health-care costs, disability, absenteeism, and productivity losses (Sauter, Murphy, & Hurrell, 1990). The causes of stress are called stressors. Stressors vary in type and in severity (Dalloway, 2008a). Work stressors take various forms, and numerous studies have identified specific stressors and their effects. Cooper and Cooper & Arbose (1984) identified stressors as overload, inadequately trained subordinates, long working hours, attending meetings, and conflicts between work and family and other social relationships. Managers and employees need a framework for thinking about and diagnosing sources of work stress caused by stressors: workload, job conditions, role conflict and ambiguity, career development, interpersonal relations in the organization, and conflict between work and other roles (Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995).

As mentioned above, among other job related stressors interpersonal relations in the organization can cause stress on the condition that they are poor. Stress from poor interpersonal relations can occur because of the relationships and communication between co-workers, managers, customers, and vendors. This is a high source of stress, especially when employees are working in teams. Co-workers can be rude and disrespectful. Clients can be difficult to work with. When there is stress across departments, people get emotional and impatient and manners go out the window and communication breaks down (Dalloway, 2008b). Groups have a tremendous impact on the behaviour of people in organizations. Good working relationships and interactions with peers, subordinates, and superiors are a curial part of organizational life, helping people achieve personal and organizational goal; when poor and missing, they are sources of stress (Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995). At work setting intrusions by others such as interruption by noisy co-workers, ringing telephones and other people walking into and around their work stations can be principal sources of stress (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1987). Many factors determine how employees experience work stress, including their perception of the situation, past experiences, the presence or absence of other employees and a variety of individual differences and interpersonal relationships can be a source of stress or the social support that effects how employees react to stressors (Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995). Most people want to work with others whom they can like and respect. Many people meet needs for belonging and love through work. Being able to feel close to your co-workers makes one feel a part of the team. One's association with other workers thus brings him or her satisfaction (Sasse, 1981).

In academic setting, stress originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations can be of concern as it is likely to have significant personal implications through academic staff dissatisfaction, lowered motivation and lowered emotional and physical health of academic staff. Thus a study to be done to understand the academic staff's perceptions on stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in faculty setting will contribute us to realize the influences of this kind of stressors and help us create a friendly academic setting where academic staff can work effectively. The purpose of this study was to understand the academic staff's perceptions on stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in academic setting and to understand the influences of this kind of stress on academic staff. Thus, the study examined what stressors originating from colleague-colleague relations in academic setting are, what academic staffs' perception of stress are and what their views are about how to overcome stress as a result of stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in academic setting – informal and formal relations with colleagues?

2. Method

A qualitative approach was selected for this study because this research was more concerned with understanding individuals' perceptions of the world and seeking insights rather than statistical analysis (Silverman, 2005). Because investigation of academic staff's experiences related to stressors originating formal and informal relations took place in faculty setting, faculty was viewed as an instrumental case study. Case studies can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects. Further, contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relations and other factors in a unique instance (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Thus, the focus of this study was influences of job stressors on academic staff in the faculty setting and their perceptions by informants. Particular attention was paid to the influence of stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in faculty setting - informal and formal relations with colleagues.

2.1 Sampling

This study was conducted in a faculty in the city centre of Sheffield in UK and in a faculty in the city centre of Antalya in Turkey. A non-probability sample was used because 'the sample derives from the researcher's targeting a particular group, in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population, it simply represent itself. This is frequently the in small scale research, for example, as with one or two schools, two or three groups of students, or a particular group of teachers, where no attempt to generalize is desired; this is frequently the case for qualitative researches such as action ethnographic or case (Cohen *et all*, 2007). The informants in this study were academic staffs. I had conduct with eight academic staff -four in Sheffield Hallam University and four in Akdeniz University- who were volunteers working in the present faculty for at least five year school period. There was no limitation to age of academic staff because most of the academic staffs working in faculties were over 40 years old.

Table 1.Participants' status and accompanying data collection

	Position	Full Year	Study Field	University	Audiotape Interviews
NE	Senior Lecturer	Yes	Curriculum Development	Sheffield Hallam, UK	Yes (1)
RS	Senior Lecturer	Yes	Educational Research	Sheffield Hallam, UK	Yes (1)
PG	Senior Lecturer	Yes	Educational Research and Sociology	Sheffield Hallam, UK	Yes (1)
SJ	Senior Lecturer	No	Educational Politics	Sheffield Hallam, UK	Yes (1)
YT	Senior Lecturer	Yes	Language Teaching	Akdeniz, TR	Yes (1)
KK	Senior Lecturer	Yes	Educational Administration	Akdeniz, TR	Yes (1)
HK	Senior Lecturer	Yes	Curriculum Development	Akdeniz, TR	Yes (1)
TA	Senior Lecturer	Yes	Educational Administration	Akdeniz, TR	Yes (1)

2.2. Data collection

In order to investigate academic staff's perceptions on stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in academic setting, semi-structured interviews were used because it would provide an in depth exploration of the topic, it would allow me the flexibility, for example, to change the order of questions, simplify the questions and to probe the interviews (Cohen, *et all*, 2007). Data was collected from May, 2007 through July, 2008. This included a 45 minute recorded interviews with the informants with initial interview questions. I used face-to-face interviews. I recorded informants' experiences, thoughts and feelings in a taped diary.

2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis began with repeated readings of interview transcripts from conversations with academic staff. The purpose was to determine the essence of the phenomenon and structures of experiences of academic staff related to stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in academic setting and to understand the influences of this kind of stress on academic staff.

During data analysis, the data were organized categorically and chronically, reviewed repeatedly and continually coded. Interview transcripts were regularly reviewed. In addition, data analysis process was aided by the use of a qualitative data analysis computer program called NVIVO. These kinds of computer programmes do not actually perform the analysis but facilitate and assist it. That is NVIVO does not perform the analysis but only supports the researcher doing the analysis by organizing data and recodes and nodes etc (Kelle, 1995; Cohen *et all*, 2007).

2.4. Interview process and mapping

The aim of this study was to understand the academic staff's perceptions on stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in academic setting and to understand the influences of this kind of stress on academic staff. Thus the mapping of interview questions was carried out in three levels. Firstly, they were asked what kind of formal and informal interpersonal relations they had. Secondly, they were asked which of these relationships they found stressful. Finally, they were asked what made those relationships stressful for them and follow up questions related to those answers and how to overcome stress originating those relationships.

3. Results

This section will cover what lecturer said about formal and informal interpersonal relations, what made those relations stressful for them and how to overcome stress originating from those relations. It will deal mainly with their responses to questions and follow up questions.

3.1. Formal relationships in faculty setting

Lecturers were asked about what kind of formal interpersonal relations or formal meetings they had at work and follow up questions related to this. NE stated that she had three kinds of formal relationships in faculty setting with the person who was her manager and the person who was the head of area she was in and also with people who headed up the programme and union meetings as a union representative from the faculty. She stated about the content of those meetings: *'They are very formal meetings, meetings with agenda and minutes and would be discussing business of the area which is about the funding and general purposes of what we are doing. The programme meetings would be looking at the quality of teaching those going on together with targets or notes what we are trying to achieve, those related with teaching or working. Those are main source of meetings.'*

RS stated that he had four kinds of formal relationships in faculty setting with managers, colleagues in department meetings, committees in meetings in research centre, and one to one appraisal meetings. He also used to have some meetings with the union. He added that one of the formal groups as a part of job was one to one meetings where things like appraisal was done. In those meetings either he was the one who appraised or he was the person being appraised in every year. PG stated that he had four kinds of formal relationships in program area, teaching in different courses and exam boards and monthly meetings related to trade union activities. SJ stated that he was not full member staff and doing little lecturing in the faculty and he had a little bit contact with the senior lecturers there and his formal relationships were conferences, courses and meeting with supervisors. YT said that he had formal relations such as formal notifications, petitions and department and program meetings. KK said that he attended formal meetings such as programme, department, management committees and sometimes general academic meetings arranged by dean or rector. HK said that she had department, program, faculty academic committee and

education centre meetings. She also added that sometimes she had daily but not planned meetings with other lecturers and research assistants usually for an academic study and sometimes for supervision. TA said that she had one to one and face to face formal interpersonal relations with her colleagues, head of the department, and head of the program due to her administrative duty as a coordinator of the program responsible for course arrangements and program meetings. She also added that she had department and program meetings. She explained why she had one to one and face to face formal interpersonal relations with colleagues and managers: *'...I usually have one to one and face to face relations. It seems as if my relations were informal. I think I can express myself better in this way. I knock colleagues' door and call in and communicate with them face to face. I rarely use telephone...'*

3.2. Lecturers' perceptions on stressors originating from formal relationships

Lecturers were asked about what was stressful for them due to formal interpersonal relations or formal meetings they had at work and follow up questions related to this. Generally speaking, though they experienced some stressful events in their formal relations in the past and expressed those stressful events, NE, RS, PG and SJ stated that those formal relations were not really stressful for them; the things which were stressful for them were workload, lack of administrative support and unpredictability. For instance, NE thought that these meetings were not stressful and she was never worried about them in anyway and she was quite comfortable in relationships with people in those meetings. However she confessed that sometimes the way which the meetings were run could be stressful due to not sharing very well, some colleagues talking to each other, over her and interrupting her during meetings, difficulty to reach a decision and so going on a long time, which affected her due to her heavy workload negatively and caused stress. She generally stated that she rarely experienced stress due to her formal interpersonal relations with managers and the people who headed up the programme. She stated one of stressful experience with managers: *'...When I first drove to university, the person who headed up the area I was in when I was very new to university, I found it very difficult. The reasons I found relationships with that individual very difficult was she didn't give me the information I needed to do with my job. So actually I couldn't get on with things. If I asked her for information, then she would be very defendant and get cross with me. It decayed ours being innocence, led ours being aggressive. That was very difficult. I think she was also very stressed at that time...'* She also complained about the way managers used power: *'...the way they want to control things and not wanting let other colleagues get on with the work so they tended to...there was an assumption that the way I was doing was more important than what other colleagues were doing. Mmm and they were very domineering in meetings and they would put down and make other people feel very small in meetings by what they said and challenge ... it was bullying. It was bullying because they feel insecure about their own positions.'* Just like NE, HK also complained about the managers: *'...managers who run the meeting dominate others in the meeting and ignore my and others' views and contributions and this is really very stressful for me and my colleagues.'* NE also added that long meetings as a result of colleagues' talking too much could be stressful for her due to lack of time for her responsibilities at work.

Besides, RS thought that those formal meetings were not stressful, either and he was relaxed in those formal meetings. However he confessed that pressure on time was important and those meetings could be stressful because of a lot of work to do before and after and during meetings, pressure to think about, lots of rush, being away from things essential to job and things to do, difficulty to reach a decision, so going on a long time, conflict in argument and being affected by the decision against someone's values and things the way someone was accustomed to do. He complained about argument in formal meetings: *'...Sometimes stress during meetings can be argument. It depends on how you feel about conflict in argument. I am not good at conflict and arguments and I attempt not to do them. Stress comes from some people because they are difficult and like arguments and conflict. Instead of expressing about feelings, if you don't let things go by or you are worried about conflict as well, there can be stress for you. However some people like conflict and they are not stressed in formal meetings...'*

Just as RS do, TA admitted that she always avoided from conflicts because she thought that those arguments and conflicts caused the occurrence of informal groups against management in program and in department and that this was not the way she was used to and against her way of life and personality. Similarly, PG also thought that these meetings were not particularly stressful for him. What he found stressful in the past was that if there were people who did not know what they were talking about or they were dominating meeting or there might be some interpersonal conflicts going on and also to get everybody to agree on something when leading a group. He also added that when leading a group, there should be a balance in responsibility and power, if not, it could be source of stress. Besides, he complained about work load and unpredictable aspects: *'...Yesterday we were invited to research project. I wasn't planned to do that. So if I take on board, that can be quite stressful. It is stressful because, it has a*

short deadline and also because I need to do something. There are other people relying on it and that is additional aspect of stress... Work load and unpredictable aspects are stressful. If you have to work unexpectedly, those kinds of things are stressful.'

Both PG and NE complained that there was very little administrative support and thus this increased their work load, which caused stress. As for SJ, he did not think that he found teaching stressful in the faculty because of getting very good feedback from students, which motivated him while teaching education policy and subjects related to it and he was quite good with people and at interacting with them and he had quite positive and enjoyable formal and informal relationship with his colleagues and supervisors because he was good at distinction between being professional and friendship.

In contrast to NE, RS, PG and SJ, YT, KK, HK and TA stated that they experienced stressful events in their formal relations and those formal relations were really stressful for them in the past and at the moment. For example, YT felt stress as a result of his formal relations at the meetings partly because managers or colleagues were not professional and instead of doing things according to rules and laws, they were individualizing the decisions and dominating others at the meetings and he also indicated that from time to time, he petitioned head of department or dean for solving problems because he was not able to solve problems by talking face to face and authority was indifferent to subordinates desires and they behaved against the rules.

Similarly, KK stressed on the same problem with managers *'... the most important problem and a source of stress in this faculty are the managers. They do not fulfil their responsibilities although they have legal power for this...managers are not professional and they either do not know or little know about higher education laws which they are to obey and instead of taking care of laws and rules, they insisted on making decisions and doing things based on their past experiences.'* Besides, KK stated that he felt stress as a result of his formal relations, too and he thought that his faculty was not institutionalized and that things related to management were not done formally but informally. He was also unhappy with the way formal meetings were run. He thought that in those meetings topics were not discussed legally but how the manager liked. He added that pressure on time was a source of stress due to badly and long run meetings. Sometimes he thought that the topics which should be discussed in other meetings were discussed and so the topic which should be discussed in the meeting could be ignored.

For HK, what was stressful in those meetings were that sometimes those meetings were not run legally, they were not planned and pressure on time as they lasted longer than expected. She stated that the topics to be discussed in the meeting were not well arranged before meeting, which caused meetings badly run just as KK stated. She also thought that if people were close friends, this effected badly when decisions were made in meetings because decisions were subjective but objective as a result of intimacy of colleagues.

As for TA, what were stressful in those meetings were arguments and conflicts. She thought that people were not understandable and empathic and even they did not try to understand each other. She was also restless when she felt that she went between because people gossiped about each other rudely on her formal visits to colleagues' rooms for coordination.

3.2. Informal relationships in faculty setting

Lecturers were asked about what kind of informal interpersonal relations or informal meetings they had at work and follow up questions related to this. RS stated about informal meetings and their content: *'They range from a lot of, one to one incidental relationships with colleagues to accidental ones. Sometimes I have also relationships with people I work close to. Sometimes I have unplanned and accidental meetings in the dining room and in campus with people I come to know. Those meetings are sometimes social and sometimes related to a business to deal with. I also need to talk to students and their supervisors and so whatever. There are a lot of interactions in formal meetings. There are a lot of interactions in the work place and in the office in formal meetings because you work close to people.'*

Other academic staff stated nearly same things about the type and content of their informal relations. For example, SJ said that he had quite positive informal relationships with his supervisor and other colleagues in conferences. PG exemplified his informal interpersonal relations such as chatting with close friends and with others for acknowledgment. Besides, NE exemplified her informal relationships as chatting with the colleague with whom she shared her room and with others in their rooms at lunch or coffee breaks. YT stated that he had informal relations with his colleagues in their rooms, in canteen and sometimes outside work setting. He met them and talked about personal things, problems related to faculty and nation. Additionally, KK stated that he was close to

colleagues physically at work and saying them hello and being at tea and coffee breaks together were informal interactions with colleagues. HK stated that she had informal relations with colleagues at lunch in canteen and sometimes room and home visits. She added that she talked to other colleagues informally when she needed a solution to a problem related to job or personal and usually she talked about personal issues in those meetings. On the other hand, frankly TA said that she had quitted her informal relations with colleagues but she stated that in the past she had informal relations with 3 or 4 colleagues in colleagues' rooms, in canteen and sometimes outside work setting where she met them and talked about personal things and other colleagues.

3.3. Lecturers' perceptions on stressors originating from informal relationships

Lecturers were asked about what was stressful for them due to informal interpersonal relations or informal meetings they had at work and follow up questions related to this. Generally speaking, though they experienced some stressful events in their informal relations in the past and expressed those stressful events just as they did in their formal relations, NE, RS, PG and SJ stated that those informal relations were not really stressful for them and they were happy with their informal relations with their colleagues. For example, NE was pleased with sharing her room with other two colleagues although sometimes she could not concentrate on what she did because of noise of other colleagues' chatting each other and getting interrupted by colleagues. However she admitted that when she had an argument with colleagues on anything, she sometimes felt stress and got cross with each other and she immediately added that this was temporarily and relations went back good again. Similarly, RS was also pleased with sharing his room with other colleagues and he preferred to share the room with people. However, he complained about noise and interruption, just as NE did, *'...But a lot of students comes and see him, there can be a lot of interruptions from job and be very noisy. So this could be stressful. If you are pressured too much, I find it is not easy to do work in this way...'* Both NE and RS agreed that stress as result of informal relationships was from work setting and workload but from people. As for PG, he thought that chatting with colleagues was just a normal situation. What was abnormal was that when he was imperative to do something in short deadline, colleagues were not understandable. Both PG and NE agreed that colleagues were very understandable to each other in the faculty. For example PG stated this sensibility of his colleagues: *'By coming to work I want to concentrate on something. I know that I can be interrupted. I know someone calls in here and wants to drink a cup of tea. That is just normal. If I am absolutely imperative to finish something by twelve o'clock, I say I am sorry and I can't do this today... So, most people will understand this. I can say I am sorrysee you later. That is just normal.'* Besides, SJ stated that he had quite positive and enjoyable informal relationships with colleagues because he was good at distinction between being professional and friendship. He thought that as long as a colleague distinguishes between being professional and friendship, he or she would get on well with each other and so informal relationships would not be a source of stress.

In contrast to NE, RS, PG and SJ, YT, KK, HK and TA stated that they experienced stressful events in their informal relations and those formal relations were really stressful for them in the past and at the moment as they stated for their formal relations. However, they all accepted the importance of informal relations in work life. For example, YT stated that he felt stress as a result of informal relations if topics which should be talked in formal settings were talked and tried to solve in informal settings such as canteen and tea breaks in rooms. He also believed that in the faculty informal interpersonal relations were not as they should be and they effected formal relations as well and the reason for this as he stated in formal relations was no institutionalization in this faculty. Just like YT, KK believed that interpersonal informal relations were important in creating a positive atmosphere in an organization on the condition that they should not affect formal management and decisions. HK also thought that informal relations could be stressful if the decisions in the formal meetings were affected by informal close relations. Additionally, YT thought that as he spent most of his time in faculty even more than the time at home, colleagues should be friends and be kind to each other and that as long as he did not have colleagues in whom he could trust, he felt stress to a great extend. Besides, both KK and HK stated that they were sharing their room with another colleague and this could be a source of stress both for them and the other colleagues and they complained that a lot of students came and saw them and added that there could be a lot of interruptions from job and be very noisy. KK believed that what was ideal was that every colleague should have their own room alone in order to work effectively. Moreover, he stated his view about chatting being unnecessary: *'...Chatting about others is a loss of time and instead of chatting, we can discuss the things related to job in the future...'* For HK, sharing room could be stressful when she had personal phone calls and visits and when those things were heard and seen by her colleague. However, she also focused on the importance of informal relations: *'...colleagues can be happy, feel self esteem and*

job satisfaction if they have healthy informal relations... As for TA, she was the one who felt the most stress originating from informal relations. She indicated that she had no colleagues to call in because she had quitted her informal relations. However, she complained about other colleagues' friends: *'...His close friends call in the room and discuss about what has happened and what is happening in the faculty and talk about other colleagues and this make me feel restless because I do not want to hear about colleagues and go between them and this is not fair when people talk about others and they do not know what they are talking about themselves.'* However she also confessed that she was not happy to work in a faculty where people are not friendly and hostile to each.

3.4. Lecturers' views on how to overcome stress due to formal and informal relations and meetings

Lecturers were not asked about how to overcome stress due to formal and informal relations and meetings directly but in follow up questions they talked and commented about how to overcome stress. For example NE focused on the importance of informal relations in overcoming stress. She thought that people needed to chat to each other in order to get rid of what made them stressful and that she would rather chat to colleagues than go on working to maintain good informal relationships: *'There are times when I stop doing something I really need to get done because the person really needs to talk and they need to get some information they urgently need from me or because they are upset about doing something and he or she needs something to talk through..... I think these colleagues create a nice working environment. I think it is worth.'* YT thought, just as NE did, that close informal relations would decrease stress at work: *'We spend much of time at work not at home. It is natural that colleagues should have close and intimate relations...after seven years in this faculty now I have colleagues in whom I can trust, which diminishes my stress. Thus informal relations are so important and as long as close informal relations develop, you feel yourself belonging to the faculty.'*

RS overcame stress due to arguments and conflicts in meetings by avoiding: *'Sometimes stress during meetings can be due to argument. It depends on how you feel about conflict in argument. I am not good at conflict and arguments and I attempt not to do...'* On the other hand, TM overcomes stress due to relations by avoiding informal relations with her colleagues: *'I keep myself away from colleges unless I have to communicate. If possible I am trying to be formal in my relations...I see that being informal effects formal relations and thus objectivity is lost.'*

PG accepted stress as natural and sometimes necessary. He thought that understandable colleagues would diminish stress: *'I don't agree with the assumption that stress is a negative thing.... Stress is not necessarily a bad thing. Some forms of stress can energize people and not necessarily bad for people.... I accept stress as a part of job. As long as other people understand the pressure under which you work, that is OK. If people don't understand, that can be very stressful.'*

SJ focused on the importance of analyse and control and the distinction between professional and friend and being positive in reducing stress: *'Actually if you are experiencing stress in any situation the way to do with it is to analyse what stress is and feeling about control of what is happening to reduce stress. If you feel of control, you reduce stress if you don't; you are the victim of stress.... They are friends as well as colleagues. I have had quite a lot of time with them although obviously I am in professional situation with these people. We have to be professionals and friendship at one side..... Trying to avoid negative relationships with people, trying to provide support to other colleagues who are finding work stressful and trying to be very positive in every way in everything we do. That is generally how I deal with stress. I gain control over it and analyse it and try to be as positive as much as I can in what I am trying to do.'* KK also noticed the importance of the distinction between professional and friend in overcoming stress: *'It is good to communicate with everybody in the faculty to the extend that informal relations do not suppress formal relations. Colleagues should develop their relations not with emotions but with system of regulations and this will decrease stress originating from formal and informal relations.'*

HK emphasised the importance of written communication in dealing with stress: *'Written communication comforts me because it is registered and objective and causes little confusion and it is also objective and easy to follow because nothing is lost and everything complies with rules. So, I think it is suitable for me.'*

4. Discussion

This study was done to understand the academic staff's perceptions on stressors originating from colleague-colleague interpersonal relations in academic setting and to understand the influences of this kind of stress on academic staff. I researched job stress originating from formal and informal relations through semi-structured interviews. Findings showed that though they experienced some stressful events in their formal relations in the past

and expressed those stressful events, NE, RS, PG and SJ stated that those formal relations were not really stressful for them. However the things which were stressful for them were workload, lack of administrative support and unpredictability. This finding is consistent with Young's (2004) findings in his study called "An investigation of occupational stress among psycho educational teachers in middle and south-eastern Georgia". In his study, he found that teacher perception of staff development opportunities and administrative support were significantly related to occupational stress levels.

It is also worth noting that all of the academic staff except SJ complained about the way managers behave and run the meetings and the way colleagues behave in meetings. For example, NE criticized managers and colleagues: *'they were domineering at meetings very much and they would put down and make other people feel very small at meetings'*. Similarly, YT criticized the way managers behaved: *'We have problems such as managers' and some colleagues' individualizing the issues. They see themselves over the rules and behave as if they were expert in management and knowing everything...they just think how they can influence others and make them decide as they think.'* The reason for this can be the lack of being professional as KK stated: *'Managers are not professional here, they are not trained well and they do not know how to put rules into action. Instead, they behave according to their experiences in the past.'* and the lack of balance between responsibility and power and not knowing how to keep this balance as PG stated *'a fair amount of power in relation to amount of responsibility Then it is more likely that you can get something done.'*

The findings also showed that informal relations were not really stressful for NE, RS, PG and SJ whereas they were really stressful for YT, KK, HK and TA in the past and at the moment. However, all the staff accepted the importance of informal relations and their role in diminishing stress in work life. This finding is parallel with the view that school is an organization where friendly relations of intimacy in interpersonal relations should exist (Halpin, 1967).

The other finding related to informal relations is those room visits by students and colleagues. Except PG and SJ, all other informants complained about those visits. For example NE complained about those visits: *'Yes, it is if you are supposed to do work, try to concentrate and at that moment getting interrupted by your colleagues, Yes, that's stressful.'* Besides, KK : *' I have no personal problem with the colleague with whom I share the room. However, when my or his students call in the room to ask something or for group study, we are interrupted and do not study effectively.'* This finding is also consistent with Sutton & Rafaeli's finding (1987) in their study called 'A characteristics of work stations as potential occupational stressors' that at work setting intrusions by others such as interruption by noisy co-workers, ringing telephones and other people walking into and around their work stations can be principal sources of stress. The solution to this problem can be interview rooms where colleagues can welcome their students and other colleagues who want to visit them.

Work stress may have both positive and negative effects. Research on work stress done so far tends to focus on its negative effects (Allen, 1990; Hellriegel *et al*, 1995). However, PG was against the assumption that work stress is necessarily a bad thing: *'If stress is everything which disturbs your normal balance, there must be some level of stress. With your questions I get the assumption that stress is negative. Well I don't necessarily agree with this assumption.... to teach well, you need a little bit stress. If you are completely relaxed, you can't teach well and it is also necessary for a good performance.'* As it can be understood what P.G. said, some forms of stress can energize people, not necessarily bad for people and people need an optimum level of stress and eustress. Additionally, if people are completely relaxed, they cannot do their job well and so stress is also necessary for a good performance.

5. Implications

These findings have important implications for the professional work life of academic staff. This study analyses the perceptions and past experiences of academic staff on work stressors originating from formal and informal interpersonal relations and those analysis are likely to enrich knowledge in understanding how stress influences colleagues' performance negatively and positively and identifying where unhealthy and healthy stress exists in

academic setting. In addition, this study suggests important implications about what can be done to help academic staff to overcome or reduce the effects of negative stressors originating from interpersonal relations in academic setting as academic staff themselves expressed their views and suggested solutions on how to overcome stress. One another implication the study has is that stress is not necessarily bad and a negative thing. In a sense, stress to some extent is necessary to activate and energize people and for a good performance.

6. Conclusion

In faculties there can be formal relations such as meeting with manager, programme and department meetings, union meetings, one to one formal meetings, committees, teaching courses, exam boards, conferences, supervision meetings, formal notifications and petition. As a result of those formal relations, there can be stressors such as badly planned meetings, being interrupted, pressure on time, difficulty to reach a decision, workload, lack of administrative support, dominating, talking too much, conflict in arguments, not to know what to talk about, imbalance between responsibility and power, being professional, individualization, institutionalization and unpredictability. Besides, in faculties there are informal relations such as sharing room with a colleague, chatting, relations with supervisors, close relationships, relations with others for acknowledgement, meeting at social breaks such lunch, coffee, cocktail, outside work setting. As a result of those informal relations, there can be job stressors such as noise, being interrupted, student visits, arguments with colleagues, no time to chat due to workload, distinction between a friend and colleague. Lecturers' views on how to overcome stress due to formal and informal relations and meetings are close informal relations, avoiding conflicts, being positive and understandable, distinction between a friend and colleague, analysing and control and written communication.

To sum up, there are intensive and various kinds of colleague- colleague interpersonal formal and informal relations in academic setting and those relations might have negative effects on academic staff as well as positive effects to some extent in universities. Thus, both academic staff and managers had better be aware of the stressors which are likely to affect academic work life negatively and positively in universities in order to create an academic setting where friendly relations in interpersonal relations should exist and thus where colleagues work effectively.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by Akdeniz University Research Fund.

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